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Prime Minister's schedule, February 14

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

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07:52

Met with Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shimomura at Kantei.

09:00

Attended a Lower House Budget Committee session.

12:12

Met with Shimomura at Kantei.

13:00

Attended a Lower House Budget Committee session.

17:09

Met with Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki at Kantei. Afterwards, met with the Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director-General Sasae and others. Later, attended a meeting of the Gender Equality Council.

18:17

Met with Czech President Klaus and host a dinner party for the president.

21:15

Had a telephone dialogue with US President Bush with Shiozaki and others present.

21:42

Arrived at the Kantei residence

4) Bush understands Japan's concern over abduction issue

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe talked with US President Bush yesterday evening over the telephone for about 15 minutes at his office. In connection with the six-party talks that ended Feb. 13, Bush said he fully understands Japan's concern about the abduction issue. Abe stressed that Japan would like to keep in touch with the United States over the abduction issue.

The talks were proposed by the United States. The two leaders affirmed that the six-party talks made headway toward North Korea's abandonment of its nuclear programs with an agreement reached this time, and they agreed that it would be essential for North Korea to translate its promise this time into action.

Meanwhile, the six-party members decided to set up five working groups, including one on the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea. In this regard, Abe and Bush confirmed that Japan and the United States would continue to work together for progress in the working groups' discussions.

Bush noted that the Japan-US alliance remains "very close and rocksolid," adding, "I'm looking forward to seeing you soon in the United States." With this, Bush expressed his expectations for Abe's visit to the United States. Abe is scheduled to visit the United States during the holidays from late April.

5) Bush in teleconference with Abe: "The abduction issue will not be left behind"

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SANKEI (Page 3) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held a teleconference with US President Bush last night to exchange views on the contents of the joint agreement reached at the latest six-party talks and other matters. The two leaders regarded the start of the process of denuclearizing North Korea as a step forward. They also shared the view that it is important for North Korea to implement the measures it has pledged to take. In reference to Pyongyang's past abductions of Japanese nationals, Bush stated:

"We are fully aware of Japan's concern. It is essential to implement the joint statement (adopted in September 2005) in a well-balanced manner."

According to an official of the Kantei (Prime Minister's Official Residence), Bush emphatically said, "The abduction issue must not be left behind. Japan will never be isolated."

In response, Abe said:

"The progress made in the six-party talks is attributed to close cooperation between Japan and the US. I hope we will continue working together on North Korea issues, including the abduction issue."

Bush also said: "The US-Japan alliance remains very close and solid. I am looking forward to receiving you in the US."

The teleconference, which was held at the request of the US government, lasted for about 15 minutes.

In a meeting of the House of Representatives Budget Committee yesterday held prior to the teleconference, Abe stated, "Unless progress is made on the abduction issue, Japan will not join the pledge in the six-party talks to offer energy aid" equivalent to 50,000 tons of heavy fuel oil in the initial phase, with an additional 950,000 tons of oil later. He added, "It will not be North Korea but we who will judge whether there was progress."

The prime minister clearly said, "The government has no intention for now of removing its independent economic sanctions" such as banning the North Korean ferry, Mangyongbong-92, from calling at Japanese ports. He was replying to questions by Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) member Kazuhiro Haraguchi.

In the Budget Committee meeting, Foreign Minister Taro Aso said in replying to a question about the energy aid equivalent to 50,000 tons of heavy oil:

"We are still skeptical (of North Korea's commitments). Although agreement was reached to set up five working groups, it is uncertain if the agreement will be translated into action. We will consider the energy aid worth 50,000 tons of oil for the first time after we find out if the plan has turned into a concrete arrangement."

6) US president on removal of North Korea from its designation as a terror-sponsoring state: "will take the abduction issue into consideration"

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)

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February 15, 2007

The six-party agreement mentions that the United States "will begin the work of removing" North Korea from its designation as a terror-sponsoring state. This item has sparked some Japanese government officials into calling on the US to deal with the matter carefully. Late yesterday, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stressed to the press corps at the Prime Minister's Official Residence: "Before the removal, Japan and the US must work in close cooperation." Shortly after this, US President George W. Bush told Abe on the phone: "I won't leave the abduction issue behind.:

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki stated at a press briefing yesterday: "Resolving the abduction issue is one of the important elements for (the US) to remove North Korea from the list of terror-sponsoring states. This will not change at all." He revealed that Special Advisor to the Prime Minister (for National Security affairs) Yuriko Koike, now visiting the US, had asked Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns for a cautious approach.

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In the US annual report "Patterns of Global Terrorism," the US has designated North Korea as a terror-sponsoring state. Considering the Japanese government's request, the annual report has cited Japan's abduction issue as one of the reasons for designating North Korea as a terror-sponsoring state since its 2003 version. The Abe administration, which has attached importance to resolving the abduction issue, is becoming increasingly nervous about the moves of the US and North Korea, particularly because America's understanding about the abduction issue has underpinned the Abe administration's policy line of pressuring North Korea.

During the telephone conversation, Bush told Abe: "I have fully understood Japan's concern about the abduction issue. I think it is important for the joint statement as a whole to be implemented in a well-balanced manner." US Ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer told reporters after delivering a speech in Tokyo: "We've stated only that we will begin the process leading to removal. Before any removal, we need to verify North Korea's moves and gain proof that (support for terrorism and the like) will not occur in the future. A long road lies ahead before that." Late yesterday, when asked whether he had worked on the US in some way or other, he made only this comment: "The US has understood well that the abduction issue is an extremely important issue."

7) Abe reveals plan to work closely with US in removing North Korea from list of nations sponsoring terrorism

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

In the wake of the adoption of the agreed document by the parties to the six-party talks, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe revealed a plan yesterday to urge the United States to remove North Korea from its list of nations sponsoring terrorism based on progress on the abduction issue. He said: "To us, the abduction issue is extremely crucial. The United States is well aware of that. In moving along the road, Japan will naturally work and discuss things closely with the United States."

Abe was responding to a question from a reporter at his official residence.

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8) US emphasizes diplomatic achievements in six-party talks

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

Hideya Yamamoto, Washington

The US Bush administration praised the agreement reached at the six-party talks on Feb. 13 in Beijing, which incorporates a promise

by North Korea to shut down its main nuclear reactor. The presidential statement said: "It is the best chance to reach a diplomatic resolution." Many critics in the United States, though, doubt that North Korea will implement its commitments. The Bush administration will find it necessary to monitor the entirety of North Korea's nuclear development programs, including uranium enrichment.

The Bush government rejected the Agreed Framework accord in 1994 with North Korea, which had allowed the North time to develop nuclear weapons. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stressed at a press conference the differences between the latest agreement and the 1994 accord, citing that the agreement was reached at the multinational talks and set a deadline for Pyongyang's implementation of the commitments.

The presidential statement pointed out that this "is the first step toward implementation of the agreement." Presidential Spokesman Tony Snow stated: "North Korea's implementation of disabling its nuclear facilities is a condition for economic, humanitarian and energy assistance." He revealed the US position that if the North violates the agreement, it will be possible to suspend aid and apply additional sanctions.

Michael Green, Japan Affairs director of the Center for Strategic International Studies, said: "North Korea returned to the six-party talks because of a lot of pressure from China and other countries. I assume that North Koreans aim to delay the implementation of its commitments by splitting up the pressure, taking advantage of the working groups." He denied the possibility of visits to Pyongyang by senior US government officials, including the secretary of state, which had occurred during the Clinton administration.

9) LDP alert to possibility of US, North Korea bypassing Japan;  
Government stresses priority on abduction issue

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
February 15, 2007

The agreement reached at the six-party talks incorporated the shutting down of North Korea's nuclear facilities and other issues. A number of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) members yesterday expressed concern about the specifics of the agreement. They are alert to the possibility of the US and North Korea proceeding with talks bypassing Japan. The government is making desperate efforts to dispel such a concern, while underscoring its stance of focusing on the settlement of the issue of the abductions of Japanese citizens.

Following a Korean Central News Agency report that the agreement was reached on the temporary shutting down of nuclear facilities, Katsuei Hirasawa during the LDP Foreign Affairs Division meeting yesterday expressed concern, "North Korea's interpretation of the agreement may be that it can resume nuclear development anytime."

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Shigeru Ishiba said, "North Korea is using the six-party talks as a means to buy time until it can miniaturize nuclear weapons."

Regarding the inclusion in the agreement of the start of efforts to delist North Korea as a state sponsor of terror, Masahiko Komura pressed a senior Foreign Ministry official: "Does the agreement say that the designation will not be lifted unless the abduction issue is settled?" Keishiro Fukushima, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Division, stated, "I want Japan and the US to make efforts to settle the abduction issue so that Japan will not be left behind."

The government intends to continue to cooperate with the US and other countries as well as to exert all-out efforts to resolve the abduction issue through a taskforce to be created anew for Japan and North Korea to normalize relations. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe conveyed these policies to Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director General Kenichiro Sasae, chief delegate to the talks, who just has returned home.

Prime Minister Abe yesterday evening underscored to reporters: "Those who are opposing my policy of giving priority to the

abduction issue say that we must not miss the bus, but what are they going to obtain if they catch the bus? I want them to think carefully who will be left behind if we get on the bus." He thus countered the point made by those who are concerned about Japan being isolated.

10) Six-party talks agreement: How should progress on abduction issue - premise for providing aid to Pyongyang -- be defined? Prime minister to exert every effort in taskforce to discuss Japan-North Korea issues

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
February 15, 2007

The Japanese government intends to exert an all-out effort to bring progress to the abduction issue, while limiting Japan's participation in providing energy aid to North Korea, as decided at the six party talks. However, the future course of a taskforce for Japan and North Korea to discuss the abduction issue is fraught with many unclear aspects. Given the agreement reached at the six-party talks, there is concern that Japan might find itself isolated. The Abe administration, whose showcase policy slogan was tackling the abduction issue, is now pressed to weave through a difficult course in setting up the taskforce.

Referring to heavy fuel oil aid to the North, Prime Minister Abe at a Lower House Budget Committee session yesterday underscored, "Japan cannot possibly provide energy to the North without progress on the abduction issue, whether it is 50,000 tons or 950,000 tons." He thus expressed his position that progress on the abduction issue is the premise for the provision of not only 50,000 tons of heavy fuel oil in exchange for its shutting down and sealing its nuclear facilities as a preliminary measure but also the provision of 950,000 tons as a reward to the North's disabling such facilities as a second step of the agreement.

However, asked by Kazuhiro Haraguchi of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) regarding what constitutes progress on the abduction issue, the prime minister simply answered, "We will make that decision."

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Some government officials are concerned about this issue with one senior Foreign Ministry official noting, "If abductees return to Japan, then it can be said that progress has been made. However, it would be difficult to make a decision in the event the North just pledges to carry out another investigation."

However, the prime minister's view appears to be that the agreement at the six-party talks will rather apply pressure on the North to deal with the abduction issue.

11) Prime Minister Abe shifts stance from pressure to dialogue

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated in his e-mail magazine, "The Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet," dated Feb. 15: "Japan, in cooperation with other countries of the world, has pressured North Korea. I hope to see this effort lead to dialogue." Abe, who had until recently emphasized the pressure policy toward North Korea, now revealed that he would shift his previous stance in response to the latest round of the six-party talks. However, he stressed that "I won't concede easily" on the abduction issue.

12) North Korea aid sparks controversy; Government avoids touching on requirements for quid pro quo

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

The ambiguous nature of the agreed document adopted by the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons programs stirred controversy at the Lower House Budget Committee session, a Liberal Democratic

Party foreign affairs joint meeting, and other venues yesterday. The opposition camp focused attention on a set of conditions for a quid pro quo in return for implementation of initial steps toward the abandonment of nuclear facilities by North Korea and grilled the government on how Japan would deal with aid. Some LDP lawmakers expressed wariness about the abduction issue being put aside due to the six-party agreement.

Kazuhiro Haraguchi of the largest opposition party Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) asked when 50,000 tons of heavy fuel oil (HFO) would be provided to North Korea, asking: "Will the parties not provide 50,000 tons of oil unless working groups (on normalization of Japan-DPRK relations and other subjects) are established?" Whether Japan, which has decided not to join the 50,000-ton oil aid program, can have a hand in deciding on when to start providing aid remains unclear. Haraguchi's question reflected concern over other countries beginning to provide aid before the Japan-DPRK working group is set in motion.

Foreign Minister Taro Aso replied, "Once (the working groups) become certain to function, 50,000 tons of oil would be provided as the first step." Aso, however, stopped short of clearly mentioning that the opening of the working groups was a condition for the aid.

The agreed document stipulates that additional aid equivalent to 950,000 tons of HFO will be provided to North Korea once the country completes declaring all nuclear programs and disables all existing nuclear facilities.

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Prime Minister Shinzo Abe indicated that Japan would not join the 950,000-ton aid program unless there were progress on the abduction issue. Haraguchi asked the definition of "progress," saying, "Will the government regard a sincere response at the working group a form of progress? Or will it provide aid only after the abduction issue is settled once and for all? There is a wide gap between the two." The prime minister simply replied, "We will make an appropriate decision on progress."

Meanwhile, in the LDP foreign affairs joint meeting, Katsuei Hirasawa noted, "South Korea thinks Japan will join the 950,000-ton aid program. A senior Foreign Ministry official sought understanding, saying, "Although South Korea wants to see Japan join the program, the country is clearly aware of Japan's position." Upper House Policy Board Chairman Yoichi Masuzoe pointed out the passivity of the six-party agreement preventing the abduction from seeing a settlement, saying: "A failure to make progress on the abduction issue would deal a serious blow to the Abe administration. I hope the agreement will not result in a worst-case scenario."

13) Koichi Kato raps government's North Korea policy; Prime Minister expresses strong displeasure

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

The Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) Asia Diplomacy and Security Vision Research Council, chaired by Koichi Kato, yesterday held a board meeting in the Diet building. A number of participants voiced their criticism or skepticism of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's policy of prioritizing the North Korea abduction issue with one noting: "The situation is developing quickly. The prime minister must change his thinking that the nuclear and abduction issues must be treated as a set." Another said, "I wonder if government has a clear-cut direction regarding its North Korea policy." The meeting brought together several participants, such as former LDP Vice President Taku Yamasaki and former Defense Agency Director General Gen Nakatani, as well as Kato.

Prime Minister Abe yesterday evening expressed his strong displeasure with those opposed in the LDP to his policy of Japan not taking part in providing energy aid to North Korea. He said, "I would ask those who are opposing my decision to carefully think about who would have to be left behind if we get on the bus."

Families of victims of abductions by North Korea are against the provision of assistance to that nation. The prime minister once again stressed his resolve to tackle the abduction issue.

The prime minister lashed out at those who are criticizing his decision, "They say I should not miss the bus, but what do they want to gain by getting on the bus." He was replying questions to reporters at the Prime Minister's Official Residence.

14) Aso, Kyuma at odds

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

"What I said is often lumped in with Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma's comments, but I have never said, 'The use of force was a mistake.' I don't like my words being mixed up with his."

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This comment came from Foreign Minister Taro Aso regarding his own statement raising questions about US Iraq policy during a Lower House Budget Committee session.

Kyuma immediately shot back, saying: "Mr. Aso indicated as if I had said 'a mistake.' Don't get the wrong idea; there is a slight difference in the nuance."

15) Japanese ambassador to the US criticizes resolution denouncing Japan

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

Hideya Yamamoto, Washington

At a press conference on Feb. 13, Japanese Ambassador to the United States Ryozo Kato mentioned a US resolution denouncing Japan over the sex-slave issue and criticized it: "It is not based on facts." Referring to Japan's efforts made so far to deal with the issue, including the release of an official statement on the military comfort women issue, Kato expressed concern that "it will have an adverse effect that is essentially unnecessary on Japan-US relations." He added that he is lobbying US legislators and government officials.

16) Some LDP lawmakers to propose review of Kono statement

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

The Parliamentary Group to Consider Japan's Future and History, made up of like-minded lawmakers of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), decided yesterday to compile before the end of February a set of proposals calling for a review of the statement by then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono and the so-called "comfort women," the Japanese euphemism for foreign women who were forced into sexual slavery for the Imperial Japanese Army. The group is led by former Education Minister Nariaki Nakayama. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said that the Kono Statement remains in effect. Eriko Yamatani, special advisor to the prime minister, also attended yesterday's meeting.

17) North Korea urged US to give up F-22 deployment to Kadena

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

In the recent round of six-party talks held until Feb. 13 over North Korea's nuclear programs, North Korea called on the United States to give up its plan to deploy the newest Stealth fighter, the F-22 Raptor, to Kadena Air Base in Okinawa Prefecture, sources revealed yesterday. The US Air Force plans to station 12 F-22 fighters temporarily at Kadena. Actually, their arrival in Okinawa has been delayed. This fact is therefore believed to denote the United States' softening of its attitude in its policy toward North Korea.

In the six-party talks, North Korea criticized the United States for its policy of regarding North Korea as an enemy, according to the sources. North Korea urged the United States to call off its planned deployment of F-22 fighters to Kadena and to suspend its joint

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training exercises with South Korea. The planned F-22 deployment to Kadena is intended to "constrain North Korea against its nuclear test," according to a senior official of the Foreign Ministry. The US delegation avoided discussing these matters in the six-party talks. However, the arrival of these F-22 stealth fighters has been delayed due to bad weather. They were initially scheduled to arrive at Kadena on Feb. 10. On Feb. 13, the US Air Force explained that their arrival has been delayed due to a problem with the navigation system software and that they would arrive in several days.

"The United States prioritized reaching an agreement in the six-party talks, so the United States showed consideration so as not to irritate North Korea," a Japanese government source said yesterday.

18) Emergency flights above residential areas likely: Abe

TOKYO (Page 2) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

In connection with the issue of relocating the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Ginowan, Okinawa Prefecture, Prime Minister Abe, sitting in on the House of Representatives Budget Committee in its meeting yesterday, was asked about an intergovernmental agreement reached between Japan and the United States on a plan to build a V-shaped pair of airstrips in a coastal area of Camp Schwab, a US military base in the northern Okinawa city of Nago, as an alternative for Futenma airfield. In reply, Abe stated that the newly planned airfield is designed for US aircraft to avoid flying above populated areas. "However," Abe added, "they may not do so in an emergency." With this, Abe admitted that US military aircraft could fly above residential areas in an emergency.

Abe's reply before the committee is what denoted his understanding that it would be unavoidable for US military aircraft to fly above residential areas only when they are in an emergency.

19) Minshuto President Ozawa continues to visit single-seat constituencies as part of Upper House election campaigning

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)  
February 15, 2007

Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) President Ichiro Ozawa has continued his stumping tour of electoral districts where single seats are up for grabs in the House of Councillors election in July. With the aim to strengthen local organizations and a policy line of attaching priority to a united front of opposition parties, Ozawa revisited Akita yesterday, following his trip to Aomori on Feb. 13. Accompanied by Rengo (Japan Trade Unions Confederation) Chief of Secretariat Nobuaki Koga, Ozawa has stepped up approaches to local

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labor unions and companies.

Ozawa has already visited six constituencies this month. He is expected to go to Mie and Iwate prefectures this weekend. In a meeting yesterday to exchange views between the largest opposition party and Rengo Akita, Ozawa gave a pep talk: "I want you to tell me everything about policy matters. Minshuto's organizational base is weak. So let's cooperate with each other."

Of the 29 single-seat districts up for election, Minshuto has picked candidates for 21. Ozawa, who has set the goal of winning more than

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15 seats, intends to speed up his tour of the constituencies,

saying: "Only five months are left until the Upper House election (on July 22)."

But the more Ozawa focuses on winning, the more discord he creates in the opposition camp. On Feb. 5, when negotiations with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) on the election fell apart, the SDP Akita prefectural chapter decided to file its own candidate. Minshuto, however, strongly reacted, with Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama saying, "Can a SDP-backed candidate win a race?"

SCHIEFFER